

CHAPTER 7

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE

It is by no means enough that an officer of the Navy should be a capable mariner. He must be that of course, but also a great deal more. He should be as well a gentleman of liberal education, refined manners, punctilious courtesy, and the nicest sense of personal honor.

—From letters of John Paul Jones

Social etiquette has changed considerably since the days of John Paul Jones. Today, in our fast-paced, mobile, informal 20th-century society, many of the old customs have disappeared. However, certain esteemed traditions still survive.

The following pages will discuss some of the more common situations pertaining to social etiquette. For a more complete and detailed coverage of naval social etiquette, refer to the *Social Usage and Protocol Handbook*, OPNAVINST 1710.7, and to *Service Etiquette*, published by the United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland.

Bear in mind that as a naval officer you will deal with many people whom you do not know personally. At such times, social customs are practical. They help to improve life, to get things accomplished quickly, to smooth the course of friendly gatherings, and to eliminate friction in our daily contacts with each other.

PERSONAL DRESS

When you purchase your uniforms and accessories, we recommend you purchase the best you can afford. Buying cheap articles works out as poor economy in the long run—you get what you pay for!

When you are in uniform, make sure you are in a prescribed uniform of the day. Remember to remain in that uniform when working in an office or a stateroom. Correct civilian attire for social events is equally important. Refer to table 7-1 for guidelines on attire. The guidelines shown in table 7-1 are based on the protocol requirements of Washington, D.C. In other areas of the country, such as California or Hawaii, social occasions call for far less formal attire.

When in doubt, inquire as to local custom. The increased informality in modern-day living dictates a wide latitude in apparel; therefore, encourage guests to feel comfortable in whatever they choose to wear.

COMMUNICATIONS

Correct, simple, and thoughtful speech, coupled with a capacity for intelligent conversation, is one of the greatest assets you can have.

Ensure your conversation reciprocates, not monopolizes. Engaging and intelligent conversation requires, among other things, a broad contact with literature and familiarity with current events. Devote time to reading and studying. Cultivate an interest in national and international affairs. Although specialization seems to be the order of the day, strive to maintain a broad point of view to keep the events of the day in perspective.

Correct telephone speech is extremely important; poor telephone habits may often lead to misunderstandings. When placing a call, identify yourself by name. When answering an office telephone, identify the office before stating your name.

Written communication is of equal importance. If your writing is not clear, readers won't know what you want them to do. Confusing or wordy writing causes readers to waste time figuring out your meaning or asking for clarification. Your writing is an expression of your thinking. Refer to the *Department of the Navy Correspondence Manual*, SECNAVINST 5216.5, for more details on effective writing.

INVITATIONS

Invitations vary in style and format depending upon the type of occasion, formal or informal.

FORMAL INVITATIONS

Formal invitations are most appropriate for formal occasions such as official dinners, receptions, dances, or official ceremonies. The invitations for

Table 7-1.—Dress Guidelines

	<u>MILITARY MEMBERS</u>	<u>CIVILIAN GENTLEMEN</u>	<u>CIVILIAN LADIES</u>
VERY FORMAL OCCASIONS	FORMAL DRESS UNIFORM	TAILCOAT WITH MATCHING TROUSERS, WHITE WAISTCOAT, WING-COLLAR SHIRT AND WHITE BOW TIE	VERY FORMAL EVENING GOWN
FORMAL OCCASIONS			
DAYTIME	SEASONALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICE DRESS UNIFORM	CUTAWAYS	APPROPRIATE TO THE OCCASION AS STYLE DICTATES
EVENING	SEASONALLY APPROPRIATE DINNER DRESS JACKET UNIFORM	DINNER JACKETS OR TUXEDOS	FORMAL EVENING GOWNS
INFORMAL OCCASIONS	SEASONALLY APPROPRIATE SERVICE DRESS UNIFORM	BUSINESS SUITS	AFTERNOON DRESSES OR FOR EVENING EVENTS, SHORT DRESSES OF A DRESSY MATERIAL, LONG SKIRTS OR DRESSES, OR AS CURRENT STYLES DICTATE
CASUAL OCCASIONS		OPEN COLLAR SHIRT, SWEATER, OR SPORT COAT	SLACKS OR CASUAL SKIRTS

these occasions are generally in one of the following forms:

- Fully engraved (the term “engraved” is intended to be synonymous with other modes of printing such as thermography or raised print)
- Semi-engraved
- Handwritten
- A phone call followed by a “to remind” card

INFORMAL INVITATIONS

You may give informal invitations for informal occasions such as luncheons, dinners, and cocktail parties by telephone or in writing. You may follow a telephone call with a written “to remind card.”

Informal invitations may be written on informal cards (informals), on calling cards, or on a variety of invitations available in most stationery stores. You may also include a short personal note on informal invitations. Figure 7-1 shows a sample informal invitation written on a calling card.

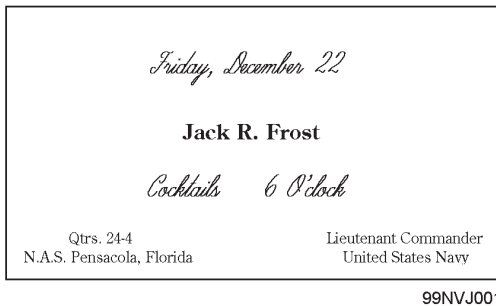


Figure 7-1.—Informal invitation.

REPLIES TO INVITATIONS

Courtesy demands a response to invitations for brunches, luncheons, and dinners within 24 hours. Follow this courtesy in consideration of the host or hostess who must make all arrangements on the basis of the number attending or invite others in case of regret. Replies to invitations not involving a meal should be sent within 48 hours.

Never answer a dinner invitation conditionally or ask the hostess if you can reply later on. Give a definite acceptance or refusal at once. If you accept, do not permit anything to prevent your attendance except the most compelling emergency. Unmarried officers should never assume that an invitation includes a guest of their own selection unless the invitation so indicates.

FORMAL INVITATION REPLIES

Generally, formal invitations include a telephone number for R.S.V.P.s (a French phrase, *repondez s'il vous plait*, meaning please reply). If an address is given for an R.S.V.P., respond with a short note. If an invitation asks for an R.S.V.P., do not ignore it. The custom is growing in the United States of indicating "Please reply to . . ." or "Telephone reply to . . ." instead of R.S.V.P. This practice urges a reply, which thereby encourages promptness.

When sending acceptances or regrets in reply to formal invitations, write them in longhand with black ink on fine-quality, undecorated, white note paper. They should follow the form and wording of the invitation. An acceptance should specify the date, time, and place if other than the host's usual residence. A regret should mention only the date. Stating the general reason for declining an invitation is not necessary, but is in good taste. Figures 7-2 and 7-3 are examples of formal handwritten acceptances

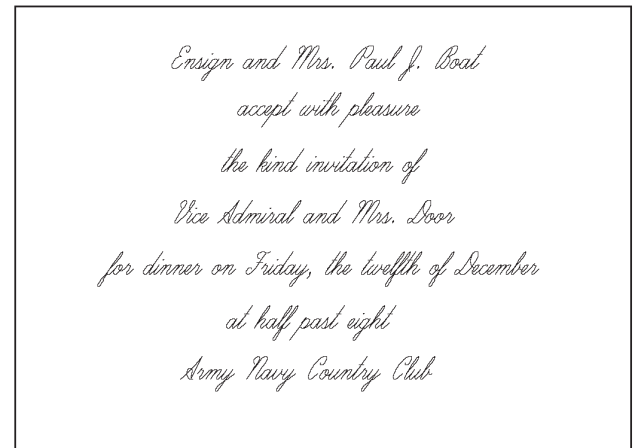


Figure 7-2.—Acceptance for dinner. (Handwritten)

and regrets. (These two examples are presented in script for purposes of clarity.)

INFORMAL INVITATION REPLIES

Informal invitations often may omit the R.S.V.P. entirely or require only a telephone reply. When an informal invitation requests a written reply, write it in the same degree of formality as the invitation on a calling card, an informal card, or a personal note.

EXPRESSION OF THANKS

Seldom observed is the formal practice of the guests' leaving cards at the hostess' home within

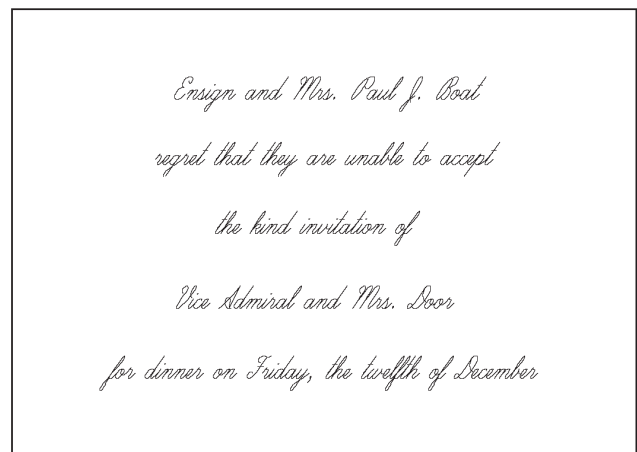


Figure 7-3.—Regret for dinner. (Handwritten)

3 days after being entertained at dinner. Today the thoughtful guest will write a note of appreciation, telephone, or send flowers. The importance of expressing your appreciation to your host cannot be overemphasized.

INTRODUCTIONS

Remember the following three basic rules when introducing two individuals:

- A man is normally introduced *to* a woman.
- A younger adult is introduced *to* an older adult of the same sex.
- An officer of lower rank is introduced *to* one of higher rank.

Most introductions go wrong because a person is too wordy. The following formats are best:

- “Mrs. Doe—Mr. Boate” (directed to Mrs. Doe)
- “Ensign Door—Chief Warrant Officer Brush” (directed to Ensign Door)
- “This is Ensign Pistol” spoken to Mrs. Frost; then to the ensign, “Mrs. Frost”

When formal introductions are necessary (high church, military, or government officials; royalty; or guest speakers), use the following formats:

- “Miss Doe, I have the honor to present Mr. Seaman”
- “Ensign Door, may I present Ensign Boat”

A male officer in civilian clothes and wearing a hat should uncover on being introduced to a woman. The officer should remain uncovered while other men of the party are being introduced to a woman or to each other in the presence of women. If in uniform, the male officer is governed by circumstances. To remove your uniform cap during the introduction is perfectly correct, but replace it sooner than you would a civilian hat. The important thing is to convey the idea of courtesy and to maintain a military appearance.

Following an introduction, the general rule is that the civilian lady starts the handshake. When two officers are introduced, the senior officer starts the handshake.

If seated, a man rises to acknowledge an introduction and remains standing while other members of the party are being introduced to one

another. However, at a table where rising might inconvenience other persons, he does not rise on being introduced to either women or men who are themselves seated.

MISCELLANEOUS GUIDELINES

The following are points of reference and handy items to know for situations that may confront you:

- Exact protocol is normally observed only in diplomatic circles and at high-level governmental affairs.
- Attire for a change of command and retirement ceremony is usually service dress if you are an observer. The attire of an officer’s spouse or date is a tailored dress or business suit. These ceremonies always provide a printed program informing guests when to sit and when to rise. When an admiral or high-ranking dignitary arrives aboard, civilian women do not stand; but during rendition of personal honors, ruffles and flourishes, or gun salutes, women stand at attention as long as the service members are saluting.
- Ship’s ceremonies, such as christenings, commissionings, and changes of command, are always daytime affairs. Attendance of guests is by invitation only.
- If you are away, your spouse is not expected to represent you at official functions except at the change of command of a friend, when invited.
- Always acknowledge wedding gifts or baby gifts from shipmates by addressing a thank you note to the senior member of the group that sent it.
- When you entertain officially, do it in a manner you can afford. If others entertain you, reciprocating is desirable and acceptable. Do not expect a senior officer to do all the entertaining.
- To call upon newcomers whose rank is close to yours is a courteous gesture.
- Never hesitate to call aides or secretaries for information or guidance.

- If extending an oral invitation, follow up with a written reminder invitation or at least a confirming phone call.
- At receptions, the woman precedes the man through the receiving line; the man gives her name to the aide or first person in line. The man precedes the woman at White House and official Air Force receptions.
- A senior officer and spouse usually give an “at home” instead of receiving and returning formal calls.
- The majority of dinners given by Navy couples are informal buffets because they are adaptable to almost any size house, they require a minimum of service, and you can prepare them in advance.

